

REMARKS

Claims 1-5 are all the claims pending in the application.

The Examiner has maintained the rejection of claims 1-4 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Schneider (DE 39 28 796) and has also maintained the rejection of claims 1 and 3-5 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Lafitte (US 2,960,879).

Applicant thanks the Examiner for conducting an interview with Applicant's representative on December 16, 2003. The following is a summary of the substance of the Examiner interview, followed by Applicant's arguments traversing the Examiner's prior art rejections.

During the Interview, the Examiner supplied additional information regarding the basis for the rejection of claims 1-5.

Regarding claim 1 being anticipated by Schneider, the Examiner alleges that the left portion of the pinion shaft 1 of Schneider corresponds to the claimed feature of "a projected portion extending from an end face of the pinion shaft in an axial direction thereof." In addition, the Examiner alleges that a snap ring is shown below element 26 which is fitted in a groove formed on the projected portion. Further, the Examiner alleges that Schneider discloses a stopper (element 26) that has an abutting surface (right side portion of element 26) that abuts an end face of the pinion 10 and also has an engaging portion (bottom portion of element 26) that engages the snap ring.

Regarding claim 2 being anticipated by Schneider, the Examiner alleges that the projected portion (i.e., the left side portion of pinion shaft 1) has a diameter that is smaller than a root diameter of a spline portion (element 4).

Regarding claim 3 being anticipated by Schneider, the Examiner alleges that element 26 also comprises a supporting portion having an abutting surface and extending in a axial direction of the pinion shaft, wherein the support portion has one end near the pinion 10 so as to enclose an end of the pinion shaft.

Regarding claim 4 being anticipated by Schneider, the Examiner alleges that the pinion shaft 10 is spaced from the support portion (i.e., a portion of element 26).

Regarding claim 1 being anticipated by Lafitte, the Examiner alleges that the right portion of the pinion shaft 3 corresponds to the claimed feature of “a projected portion extending from an end face of the pinion shaft in an axial direction thereof.” In addition, the Examiner alleges that a snap ring 12 is fitted in a groove formed on the projected portion. Further, the Examiner alleges that Lafitte discloses a stopper (element 10) that has an abutting surface (left side portion of element 10) that abuts an end face of the pinion 8 and also has an engaging portion (right portion of element 10) that engages the snap ring 12.

Regarding claim 3 being anticipated by Lafitte, the Examiner alleges that element 10 also comprises a supporting portion having an abutting surface and extending in a axial direction of the pinion shaft, wherein the support portion has one end near the pinion 8 so as to enclose an end of the pinion shaft.

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Regarding claim 4 being anticipated by Lafitte, the Examiner alleges that the pinion shaft 8 is spaced from the supporting portion (i.e., a portion of element 10).

Regarding claim 5 being anticipated by Lafitte, the Examiner alleges that a spring 9 is mounted on the projected portion for urging the stopper (element 10) in a direction toward a ring gear (see Fig. 6).

Applicant respectfully traverses the Examiner's rejections as follows.

Applicant's claimed invention provides a pinion slip-off preventive structure comprising a unique combination and arrangement of features including, *inter alia*, a projected portion extending from an end face of a pinion shaft in an axial direction thereof and having a groove formed on a smooth surface thereof in a circumferential direction thereof; a snap ring fitted in the groove; and a stopper having an abutting surface in abutting engagement with an end face of the pinion and an engaging portion engaged with the snap ring.

Neither Schneider, nor Lafitte, discloses or suggests such a unique combination of features. In particular, if assuming *arguendo*, Schneider and Lafitte disclose a pinion shaft, a stopper and a pinion as alleged by the Examiner, that in both Schneider and Lafitte, the stopper does not have an abutting surface in abutting engagement with an end face of the pinion, as required by Applicant's independent claim 1.

That is, contrary to the Examiner's analysis, and as clearly shown in Schneider's single drawing figure, the right side portion of element 26 (which allegedly corresponds to the stopper of Applicant's claim 1) does not abut any of the faces of element 10 (which allegedly corresponds to the pinion of Applicant's claim 1).

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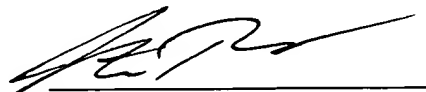
Likewise, contrary to the Examiner's analysis, and as clearly shown in Lafitte's Fig. 1 (see also, Lafitte's Fig. 9), the left side portion of element 10 (which allegedly corresponds to the stopper of Applicant's claim 1) does not abut any of the faces of element 8 (which allegedly corresponds to the pinion of Applicant's claim 1).

Therefore, Applicant's independent claim 1 and its dependent claims 2-5 (which incorporate all the novel and unobvious features of their base claim) are not anticipated by (i.e., are not readable on) either Schneider or Lafitte at least for this reason.

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned attorney at the telephone number listed below.

The USPTO is directed and authorized to charge all required fees, except for the Issue Fee and the Publication Fee, to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. Please also credit any overpayments to said Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,



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